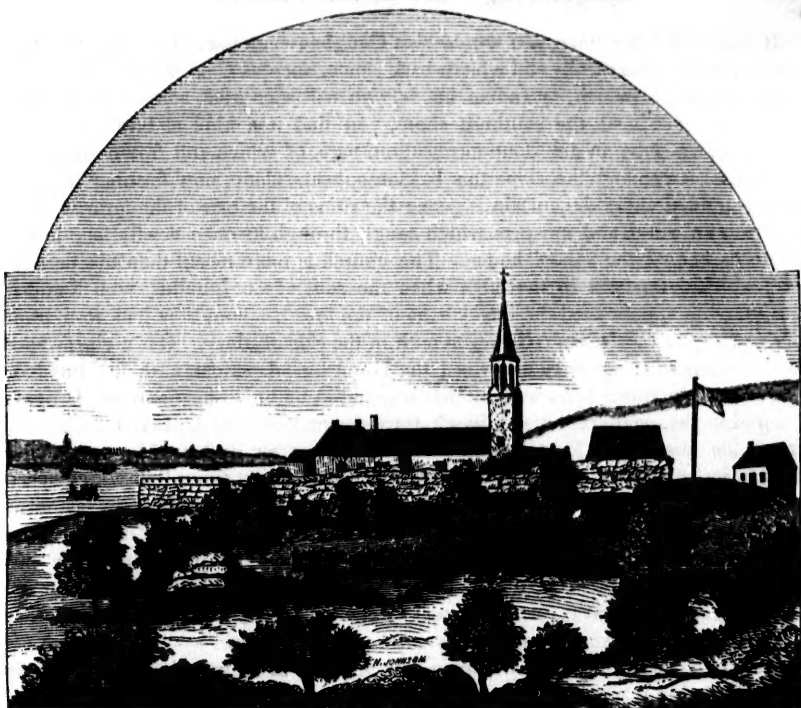




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VIEW OF CAUGHNAWAGA.

CAUGHNAWAGA, AND THE REV. JOSEPH MARCOUX,
ITS LATE MISSIONARY.

BY JOHN G. SHEA.

As the traveller descends the Saint Lawrence towards Montreal, just beside the boiling rapid of St. Louis, he descries on the shore an Indian village, and strange combination of savage and civilized life, the dusky sons of the forest will guide the steamer, pride of modern skill, over the yawning, seething gulf, amid the bristling rocks ever and anon disclosed by the gaping waters. The scene is thrilling and exciting beyond description; all around impresses one with awe, the wide expanse of the river across which the rapid extends—on one side, the Canadian village of La Chine, historic of the mighty projects of La Salle, projects inherited from Columbus in the fifteenth century, and bequeathed to Franklin in the nineteenth; historic too of the fearful massacre wreaked on its sleeping denizens, by men set on to the work of midnight slaughter by the colony of New York: on the other, the stately church and scattered cabins of the Indian town, which the French call Sault St. Louis, from its proximity to the rapid, but which the Iroquois inhabitants style simply Caughnawaga, a term which in their language is equivalent to our English word "rapid." Here too the ages blend: over the level plain behind the Indian village, you see approaching the panting steam car with its groaning train, and at a pier, lies a steamer to convey the passengers to La Chine.

OF CANADA
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If from the latter town you would visit Caughnawaga itself, you may take this boat, or more romantically still a birch-bark canoe, such as Cartier found here three centuries ago, in which, by Indian hands, you will soon glide across the majestic river. As you near the southern shore, you find it a kind of bluff, the steep ascent crowned by an old stone fortification, parts of which still frown upon the intruder. Ascending the slope this bastion appears alone, now forming the parsonage garden wall; the curtain is gone; the ruins of the rear of the fortress overgrown with vines and creepers which laugh through its once deadly loop-holes, stretches behind the school house. The church is more recent than the parsonage, which dates back to the days when the sons of St. Ignatius, who founded the mission, still directed the dusky sons of the forest, whom they had won from the worship of the demon Aireskoi to faith in the Son of Mary. It is a classic spot in Canadian soil: we have enshrined the Homes of American authors; this too, deserves that name: here, with all that is grand in nature to inspire them, Bruyas, the philologist, completed his Mohawk grammar and dictionary; here Charlevoix, wrote his *History of New France*; here Lafetau drew up his "Manners of the American Indians, compared to the manners of the earliest times," in which every classic author gives his part; and here, in our own day, Marcoux gave the last form to his incomparable grammar and dictionary of the Caughnawaga dialect of the Iroquois language, and compiled those catechisms, books of prayer, devotion and instruction, which furnish such a library to his flock. Home of literary men, home of laborious priests, to whom science owes so much! 'tis time indeed that pen and pencil should essay to portray thee.

Marcoux is no longer there: but a few months in zealous devotedness to his flock, he sank a martyr to charity, and as we wander through the irregular streets of the town, and enter at the evening hour of prayer the Church of St. Francis Xavier, we find indeed the same Indian forms, veiled in their blankets, blue and white, each sex apart, and distinguishable only to the stranger by the color, for the former hue adopted by the saintly virgin of the mission, the far-famed Catharine Tehgahkwita, is still the exclusive color worn by the female portion of the congregation. All this we find, but the well known voice of the pastor is silent; never again will the church echo to his words of Caughnawaga, which none, red man or white, e'er spoke as he did.

The Reverend Joseph Marcoux was born at Quebec on the 16th of March, 1791, of a family originally from the county of Tonnerre in Champagne, which was, however, one of the first to enter into the spirit of colonization, and at an early date settled at Beauport, near Quebec.

The young Joseph was educated in his native city; the English government had indeed suppressed the College of the Jesuits, and turned the venerable building into a barrack, but it could not extinguish the Catholic spirit of the Canadians, or the devotedness of their bishop and clergy to the Holy See. The priests of the foreign missions, who had from the time of the holy Laval directed the ecclesiastical seminary, now developed their preparatory school, to meet the wants of the time, and in the University, Laval, have at last established the noblest seat of learning in the land. In this institution, then known merely as the "Little Seminary," the youthful Marcoux received a solid education: his piety was remarkable; not volatile and fitful, but steady and constant, upheld by a strict watchfulness over his own heart and passions. He was clearly marked out for the priesthood, and none who had known and admired him, wondered at his entering the ecclesiastical seminary; least of all, did his school-mate and firm friend, Peter Flavian

Turgeon, who like him entered the army of Christ, and is now by his zeal, piety and devotedness, worthy of his exalted rank as Archbishop of Quebec.

There is not in Mr. Marcoux's life a more pleasing trait than the warm and unaffected friendship which subsisted to the end between him and the future prelate. For his part, his choice was early made: the life of a parish priest, one of comparative ease, he resolved to renounce, and while still in his theology began to study the Iroquois language in order to fit himself for the post of missionary at either of the three villages of that language near Montreal. To pursue this study was no easy task; for though this language, the Huron-Iroquois, had received greater attention than any other from the early missionaries, who drew up grammars, vocabularies and tables of radicals for several dialects, still the language had so changed, that their labors were now of comparatively little utility for the missionary. Cartier has left us a vocabulary of the Hochelaga dialect; Sagard, one of the Huron proper; Brebeuf, a grammatical outline of the same, with a translation of Ledesma's catechism; Chaumonot, a full and complete grammar, the guide of all subsequent missionaries for any dialect; Bruyas, a grammar, radical words and vocabulary of the Mohawk, de Carheil of the Cayuga, with catechisms in several dialects, all of which still remain precious monuments of zeal and mines for philological research, but perfectly obsolete and unavailable to teach the descendants of the Mohawks who adored Christ by the rapids of St. Louis, at St. Regis, or at the Lake of the Two Mountains.

Their example, however, inspired him; and gifted with rare talents for philological labors, patience, a nice discernment and great industry, he began those studies which gave him so high and deserved a rank. He did not, however, neglect his theological studies, but on the contrary, pursued them with such assiduity that he passed his final examination at an unusually early age, and presenting himself for ordination at the age of twenty-two years and two months, required a dispensation to enable him to receive Holy Orders. He was then invested with the priesthood at his native city, on the 12th of June, 1813, by the Rt. Rev. Joseph Octavius Plessis, eleventh Bishop of Quebec.*

The young priest was not long unemployed: the very year of his ordination he was despatched as missionary to St. Regis, an Indian town lying on the banks of the St. Lawrence, partly in Canada and partly in New York. To this spot he at once repaired: but soon found his position one of difficulty. St. Regis was founded about 1760, by a young New Englander, named Tarbell, taken prisoner by the Caughnawagas and adopted into the tribe by the Indian name of Karekowa. With his brother and their families, they set out guided by their pastor, the Jesuit Mark Anthony Gordon, and at Aquasasne began a new village and mission, to which the Father gave the name it still bears, St. Regis. Partly of American origin, the Indians of St. Regis evinced a partiality for the Americans, and in the war of 1812, some led by Gray and influenced by Eleazar Williams, a Caughnawaga, whom proselyting societies in New York and New England had transformed into a missionary, joined the American army. The town itself was surprised by the American troops, and the Rev. Mr. Roupe was taken prisoner. From this fatal period a division has always existed in the village, highly prejudicial to the temporal and spiritual interests of the people. It was Mr. Marcoux's lot to be thrown into the midst of the excitement, when the minds of both

* I owe these details in part to a notice in the *Journal de Quebec*, August 2, 1855, but chiefly to a communication from my obliging friend, the Rev. J. B. Ferland, of Quebec, well known for his labors in the field of Canadian History.

parties were embittered by the controversy, and by no means disposed to listen to words of peace. His zeal and abilities, however, soon triumphed in part, and having perfected himself in the language by nine months study under the Rev. Mr. Roup and subsequent practice, he labored for six years as a faithful missionary. Then, however, he was accused of being friendly to the Americans, and even received the name of Ratsihenstatsi Wastonronon, that is, Bostonian or American priest. The Colonial Government believed his accusers, and Sir John Johnson called upon the Bishop of Quebec to withdraw him. The charges against the missionary were groundless, but he yielded to the storm, and was immediately placed by the Bishop at Sault St. Louis, whose pastor was just dead. Here he was installed in March, 1819, to the joy of the Indians, who were delighted alike with his skill in their language and the zeal he showed for adorning the house of God. Many and frequent indeed were the charges brought against him by these fickle sons of the forest: atrocious at times their calumnies against him, but he was ever the same, kind, patient, never betraying the least resentment, or desire of triumphing over his ungrateful children.

The life of Mr. Marcoux was ever uniform, entirely devoted to the spiritual good of his flock, and neglecting nothing to ameliorate their condition. Many evils saddened him: intoxication and licentiousness ravaged the tribe, and his earliest efforts were directed to a reformation of morals. Having at last restored the ancient simplicity and purity, he firmly maintained the discipline introduced by the first missionaries, of which age and experience had proved the wisdom. In this he did not succeed without much opposition and frequent contradiction, but adapting himself perfectly to the Indian disposition, he gained an ascendancy which made him irresistible.

Justly deeming their instruction the greatest means of preserving them in virtue, he devoted himself assiduously to the study of the language, and with such success that Chateaubriand in his travels devotes a most interesting chapter to his grammatical labors.

That the reader may form some idea of these, we shall give a few details on the Caughnawaga dialect of the Mohawk. It is a guttural language, destitute of labials, with every syllable aspirated, and uttered with no motion of the lips, and none scarcely perceptible in the muscles of the face, giving the speaker a most curious appearance to an observer. The sounds of the language are few, consisting in all of eleven. Its grammar is most simple and yet most complex: simple, for as in all the dialects of the Huron-Iroquois, every word is conjugated like the verb: complex, for the verb thus absorbing all, assumes an endless variety. Then too, there is nothing abstract, no infinitive mood, no abstract noun, no auxiliary, no participle, no passive verb; the words vary at the beginning to represent the subject, at the close to represent the object direct or indirect, and even remote relations. With three numbers, two genders, an absolute, reflective, reciprocal and relative forms, the verb assumes a fearful form to the student, and even Mr. Marcoux's methodical paradigm cannot overcome his fear.

A glance at a verb may elucidate this. Take *Iskwens*, I hate; in the reflective form it becomes *Katatswens*, I hate myself; in the reciprocal, *Tekatatswens*, I hate myself mutually with some one; in the relative form, *Konswens*, I hate thee. Each of these then, in turn, has its variations for each person, number and gender, in every mood and tense.* All verbs are divided into two paradigms, distinguished by characteristic letters, and each paradigm has five regular conjugations.

* Chateaubriand—Voyage en Amerique. (Ed. Didot 1845) p. 403.

The tenses are formed as follows: *Kenonwes*, I love; *Kenonweska*, I was loving; *Enkenonwene*, I will love; *Akenonwena*, I may love; *Kanonwehon*, loved; *Wakenonwehon*, I have loved, &c.

A noun is conjugated like a verb, as may be seen by comparing them.

I love,	<i>kenonwes.</i>	my head,	<i>kenontsine.</i>
Thou lovest,	<i>senonwes.</i>	thy head,	<i>senontsine.</i>
He loves,	<i>ranonwes.</i>	his head,	<i>ranontsine.</i>
She loves,	<i>kanonwes.</i>	her head,	<i>kanontsine.</i>
They love, (indeterminate)	<i>ienonwes.</i>	their head,	<i>ienontsine.*</i>

How different this noble, full and ancient language from our English; its grammatical structure rich beyond expression, has a form for every relation, while our verb, capable of only five or six inflections, limps with its crutches of auxiliaries! The infidels of the last century represented these languages as jargons without order or system, but they are complete as a crystal. "Languages," says Cardinal Wiseman, in his noble and learned lectures on Science and Revealed Religion, "languages grow not up from a seed or a sprout; they are by some mysterious process of nature, cast in a living mould whence they come out in all their fair proportions;"† or rather may we not say, they are the work of the Creator, most beautiful, where man has made fewest attempts to improve them.

Such was the language to the study of which Mr. Marcoux devoted a lifetime, and well might it excite his enthusiastic admiration. The first fruit of his labors was a large folio vocabulary, still in manuscript; then a methodical grammar and dictionary, French Iroquois and Iroquois French, which, revised and improved, received their final form a few years back. In extent, arrangement and accuracy, they are unequalled by any work on an Indian language hitherto compiled. Anxious to instruct his people well, he soon composed a catechism, which after being examined by four competent missionaries, skilled in the tongue, was solemnly approved by Mgr. Ignatius Bourget, the holy Bishop of Montreal, on the 12th of September, 1843, not only for his own mission, but for all. "It is our will," says the approbation, "that this Catechism be the only one of which the use shall be permitted in the Missions of Sault St. Louis, the Lake of the Two Mountains, and of St. John Francis Regis."‡

With the return of sobriety and morality comparative prosperity dawned on Caughnawaga; for we do not delude any by leading them to suppose that the Indian ever acquires the scrupulous habits of neatness which are found among ourselves. At the best there is an air of unkindness which repels the visitor. They are not, however, less interesting to an American Catholic, we trust, on that account; nor can they ever fail to be an object of interest except to those who even now avow ignorance of their history. They are like the Acadian descendants of pilgrims for conscience sake; for the faith their fathers quitted kindred and home by the banks of the Mohawk, to seek on the banks of the St. Lawrence liberty to worship God, a liberty denied them by the profligate pagans of their tribe, and their white allies in the English colony. Among those who thus retired was Catharine Tehgahkwita, the "Genevieve of New France," still revered as "la

* Letter of Mr. Marcoux, March 6, 1853.

† Twelve Lectures on the Connexion between Science and Revealed Religion. Vol. I, page 73.

‡ *Ionteriwaienstakwa ne kariwiioston teioasontha kanawakeha.* Montreal, *Perrault*, 1844, page 2.

bonne Catharine," whose wonderful life and extraordinary miracles long made her tomb a celebrated pilgrimage, where the governor, the prelate, the soldier and the peasant knelt to implore God's graces through her intercession. A century, and well nigh two centuries have not destroyed devotion to her: a cross has ever towered above her grave, now remote from the village. In 1843 Mr. Marcoux erected the present one with great pomp and solemnity, and a motely group of Indians, Canadians, Irish and English were drawn to the spot by devotion or curiosity.

Two years after, from his own economy, and what he had infused into his flock, aided by funds which his zealous prosecution of old claims had obtained from the State of New York and from the British government, he began at his mission the erection of the present substantial church to replace the old edifice which began to show signs of decay. It is a fine stone church, adorned with a superb painting of St. Louis, presented to the mission by Charles X, when king of France,* enriched with presents by Louis Philip, and only last year with a magnificent cope from Napoleon III, and a chalice from the Princess Eugenia.

The missionary's next labor was the composition of a book of prayers, hymns and devotions for the use of his flock, which was printed at Montreal in 1852, with the title "*Kaiatonsera Ionterrenaientakwa*," &c., a book frequently seen at New York on a Sunday morning at St. Peter's Church, in the hands of the squaws who come to that city to sell their baskets, moccasins, and other work.

Mr. Marcoux was now sinking; his health had been shattered in his attention to the sick during the various epidemics which had ravaged the mission; he sought a successor whom he might prepare to fill his place by instructing him in the language and disposition of his flock. The Jesuits had founded Caughnawaga; they were again in Canada, and to them he applied. A father was soon stationed at the Sault, but circumstances arising from the want of fathers in the colleges, compelled the Superior of the Canada mission to recall him, and Mr. Marcoux was again left alone. The Oblates were next entreated to come to his aid, and the present incumbent, Father Antony, repaired to the Sault. The Almighty spared the venerable missionary some years longer to prepare his future successor, and not leave his works, his sermons and rituals unexplained.

During the month of May, 1855, the typhus again ravaged the mission; as before, the excellent and pious missionary hastened to the bed side of his children, but not unscathed; he was himself seized with the malady while administering the last sacraments to them, and it was soon evident that his days were numbered. He prepared for death with peace and joy, and fortified by all the consolations of religion, amid the Indians to whom he had devoted his life and over whom he had watched with so vigilant an eye, he expired on the 29th of May, at the age of sixty-four years.

In the language of one who knew him well, "He was the advocate, the notary, the physician of the Indians of Caughnawaga. He often settled their disputes, drew up all their writings, bought and prepared medicines for them."† For himself he reserved nothing; with difficulty could he be persuaded to lay out any thing for himself, even for his wardrobe: all was bestowed on his flock, who always in need, had recourse to him, sure of never being repulsed. Indeed, this charity was carried so far that there are some whom he supported for years. Nor was he less eminent for his piety and fidelity to his exercises of piety.

As a missionary and as a philologist he was known far and wide, but to such as had personal relations with him, it is well known that in courtesy, hospitality, frank and generous friendship, he yielded to none, and the writer pays in this notice his tribute to one who was ever disposed to aid his researches.

* History of the Catholic Missions among the Indian Tribes of the United States, page 343.

† Father Anthony, O. M. J.

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